

How to Prepare for Professional School

Freshman Year

- Plan a tentative course schedule for the next three years and discuss it with the pre-health professions advisor.
- Think about a major.
- Talk to various health professionals about their careers and their own career decisions.
- If you have specific questions or concerns, make an appointment to see the pre-health professions advisor.

Freshman year is a time of self-examination, academic exploration, setting goals and learning how viable those goals are. Students making C and lower grades in the sciences may want to discuss strategies with the pre-health professions advisor. Low grades often indicate that a student needs to change study habits or prioritize activities. Any student who is considering graduating in three years should contact the pre-health professions advisor as special advice might be warranted.

Sophomore Year

- Plan the intellectual focus of your curriculum and choose a major.
- Review the Pre-Health Professions web site and become familiar with its content. Refer to the website for answers to questions as they arise. Become familiar with other relevant websites and references.
- Check the appropriate resources for course requirements at the schools you may be interested in attending. These include *Medical School Admission Requirements*, *Official Guide to Dental Schools*, and *Veterinary Medical School Admission Requirements* (see website for more details). Fine tune your long-range plan to accommodate the courses you will need.
- Get exposure and experience in your field of interest by volunteer work/community service/research/etc. during the semester, semester breaks, or summer. Talk to various health professionals about their careers and their own career decisions.
- If you want to do an independent study in your junior year, begin to make arrangements with a faculty member in the spring of your sophomore year. For advice on setting up an independent study see department web pages.

Sophomore year is a time to self-evaluate and reassess your original career plans or to begin to investigate options for the first time. It is likely that you will reconsider your future many times while you are an undergraduate, and it is healthy that you do. Your awareness of the world and the multitude of opportunities available to you in your professional and personal life is rapidly expanding. Your knowledge of yourself should also be growing and you may find that careers previously unknown to you are appealing.

Some students may consider delaying their application a year or more and the end of the sophomore year is a good time to think about this option. Reasons for delay vary widely and include the following:

- Taking time between the undergraduate years and professional school to work or volunteer in a service arena
- Taking time to reconsider a commitment to the long training period required for a doctoral program in the health professions or to consider other, possibly more appropriate careers in the health professions or other fields
- Completing your senior year before applying to capitalize on an improving academic record. This strategy is commonly used by students who have had a mediocre freshman or sophomore year academically, but by their junior year are doing better in their courses.

Health professions school admission committees do not penalize those who delay their application. On the contrary, experience shows that they value a well-thought out decision to delay and consider it a sign of a mature and thoughtful approach to reaching your career goals.

Junior Year

- Attend the Application meeting in late fall. This meeting is required because it contains information about the specific tests you are going to take in the spring, and it is the beginning point of getting your letters of evaluation.
- Submit a draft of a personal essay to Dr. Crews in January (if you would like help with this).
- Register online for test you are going to take..
- Check Medical/Vet/Dental School Admission Requirements again for course requirements at the schools to which you are planning to apply.
- Use individual school web sites to research specific schools and help you decide where you will apply.

- Complete the web-based common applications to the health professions school you wish to apply. The applications are generally available online in spring or early summer.
- If you plan to enter health professions school immediately following your graduation from UNA, you will begin the application process in the summer between junior and senior years.

You will take the MCAT, DAT, OAT, PCAT, or GRE in the spring and submit the official applications in the summer for medical, dental schools, and veterinary schools. For some other health professions schools the application process begins in the fall. Although the MCAT is also given in August, medical schools strongly recommend that you take it no later than April of the year preceding the year you plan to matriculate in medical school (e.g., if you plan to matriculate in medical school in the fall of 2014, you should take the MCAT no later than April of 2013). In addition, completion of your application in June/July/early August (rather than the fall deadlines published by individual medical schools) will enhance the possibility of your acceptance. Note: the DAT and the GRE are now available as self-scheduled computerized exams. Dental schools recommend that you take the DAT in the spring before you apply to dental school.

Senior Year

- Continue to take challenging courses and a full course load.
- If you are in the process of applying, finish applications and secondary applications in a timely fashion.
- Use the Internet to research specific schools including interview feedback.
- Once you have your first interview scheduled, contact Career Planning and Development to schedule a mock interview.
- Interview at individual schools.
- Make decisions.
- Prepare financial information to submit to schools for determination of financial aid packages.
- Have a back-up plan.

After admission committees conduct a preliminary screen, based primarily on GPA and MCAT scores, applicants are asked to complete a supplemental application and submit letters of evaluation. The HPAC will transmit letters to schools on your behalf. You may then be invited for an interview. Admission committees conduct interviews at their own schools (or sometimes at a regional site) from as early as August to as late as April. Some medical schools use rolling admissions and for those schools you may know your status (accepted, not accepted, hold, or wait list) as soon as two weeks after your interview. Others (including many of the most competitive schools) prefer to complete all of their interviews before offering any acceptances. Those schools tend to make their offers in late February or early March.

After Graduation

It has become quite common for students to take a period of time between undergraduate school and health professions school.

"Time off" after graduation also gives students an opportunity for additional course work if they are committed to a career in the health professions but need to strengthen their academic credentials.

Health professions schools, particularly medical schools, expect applicants who use a pre-health professions advising office to use the office at their primary undergraduate institution. Health professions schools will take into account the strength of the undergraduate institution and it is their expectation that the health professions advisor will evaluate each applicant in relation to the cadre of applicants from that same undergraduate institution.

Modified from: <http://www.aas.duke.edu/trinity/prehealth/>